

Building
85 Calhoun Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-265

HABS
SC
10-CHAR,
173-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

BUILDING

HABS
SC
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173-

Address: 85 Calhoun Street, Charleston, Charleston County,
South Carolina.

Present Owner: J. Lerner, Sr.

Brief Statement of Significance: At one time it was believed that this structure was the only remaining example in Charleston of a building with a wagon yard, where wagoners, bringing produce from the interior of the state, were accommodated while disposing of their wares. Though this evidently is not accurate, the building is an interesting example of Charleston architecture, and was regarded by the author of the excellent guidebook This Is Charleston (Charleston: The Carolina Art Association, 2nd ed., 1960), p. 18, as a building of "value."

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A letter to the Historic American Buildings Survey from Mr. Samuel G. Stoney, Charleston architect and architectural historian, who is widely respected for his knowledge of the architecture of Charleston and vicinity, indicates that there is little justification for the "theory" that this building - with its interesting central passageway - accommodated wagoners with their teams, wagons, and produce brought from the interior of the state. Excerpts from this letter of November 27, 1963, follow:

The interesting house at 85 Calhoun Street, noteable for the large central archway in its center stands on an irregular lot about 40' x 115'. This is shown as # 4 on a plat of Christopher Gadsden's land made in 1795, a copy of which is in the Mesne Conveyance office of this county.

The first definite mention of the building that I have located is in the Assessors returns for the city in 1859 when it is described as a "court." Here that means a rental property usually in the form of a cul-de-sac. Until recently the five units then in existence took up a large part of the area. The house on the street contained two of these, another in the yard about 20' x 115' held the other three. You may figure for yourself how much room was left for a "Waggon Yard." I refer you to my letter to your Mr. Massey on the subject.

I have been unable to trace the title of the property between a lease in 1797 to a rather obscure individual from the Gadsdens and ownership in 1859 by another person of no particular importance. This would confirm my idea that, granting some method of compressing the equivalent of Conestogas, there is nothing but tradition of fairly recent invention that links an interesting building with an improbable function.

In 1861 the court was of so little importance as to have no name of its own.

Research by Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, Charleston architectural historian, in August, 1958, indicates the following original and subsequent owners:

Original owner unknown. The house stands on Lot #4 of lands of General Christopher Gadsden. [Survey of 1806, in Charleston City Engineers Office platbook, p. 40.] In 1807, John Nicholas Martin sold the property to John Sharp [Charleston County Mesne Conveyance Office, Book Z-7, p. 247.] Later owners were Richard Fordham [A-9, 279]; Elizabeth Fordham [A-9, 281]; James English [Z-21, 30]; his heirs; Joseph Dothage; John K. Coogan; William Karesh, and J. Lerner, the present owner. [News and Courier, June 18, 1951.]

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is an interesting example of anonymous architecture, in poor condition, two-and-a-half stories of stuccoed brick with a gable roof parapeted at the ends, a rectangular plan, and a central passageway to the rear yard.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: About 45' frontage by 36' deep, excluding rear porch; fronts north on the street; two-and-a-half stories.
2. Wall construction: Brick, covered with stucco, which has come off in places. There are traces of imitation stone jointing. Walls generally appear out of plumb, and have been reinforced with ties. The front wall is noticeably bowed.

3. Passageways and porches: A passageway extends through the center of the ground floor from front to rear, with a round arch at each facade and a flat plywood ceiling; the floor appears to be of earth, somewhat eroded by run-off of surface water.

Along the rear or south side is a two-story wooden porch which is not original, although it may possibly replace an original porch. The central part of the second story is enclosed with clapboards, and an exterior wooden stairway is located at the east end. This porch is in poor condition.

4. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys are located on each gable end, apparently centering on front and rear rooms, respectively. They are flush with the exterior plane of the walls and covered with stucco. The top portion of each forms the frustum of a pyramid, extended by two round plain chimney pots.
5. Openings--windows: Across the north front at the second story are seven bays, the central one containing a blank panel which may have been a window originally. There are slightly projecting lintels. Sash are double hung, six-over-six lights, set into a plain masonry opening. Windows on the west and south walls are similar. The first story on the north front has been altered to provide two unequal store fronts, leaving no indication of the original openings, except for the central archway. There are two small square windows in the west gable.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, now covered with composition shingles.
 - b. Cornice, copings: One projecting brick course, stuccoed, forms the cornice along the north front. The gables extend about one foot above the roof; the east gable has a continuous silhouette but the west gable has a higher central portion, between the chimneys. They are coped with two projecting brick courses, stuccoed. A string course similar to this coping extends across the west wall at the bottom of the gable; stucco remains indicate that this was once a cove molding. Modern sheet metal gutters hang along the north and south walls.
 - c. Dormers: There are two gabled dormers on the north and two on the south, with six-over-six light, double-hung sash.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Side lot lines are not perpendicular to the street; the plan is askew, consequently.
 - a. First floor: A passageway extends from front to rear, leaving a space on each side; these spaces are now one-room shops, but may have been divided originally into front and rear rooms. Fireplaces are closed up.
 - b. Second floor: Apparently in its original state there were two rooms on each side of a central hall; additional partitioning now divides the spaces. The attic layout appears to have been similar. [Data from E. R. Martin, August 1958]
2. Stairway: Alongside the central passageway, at the rear on the west side, is a stairway leading to the second floor; this is probably the location of an original stairway.
3. Interior finish and trim: Walls and ceilings are plastered, and there is simple wood trim at the openings. Fireplaces are closed up. [Data from E. R. Martin, August 1958]

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: This building is located on the south side of Calhoun Street, opposite Elizabeth Street. The west end adjoins a narrow alleyway and the east end abuts another building. The neighborhood is mostly commercial at present, and appears to be deteriorating.
2. Enclosures: The lot, which is rather deep, has a modern cinder block wall along the west line, and a wooden fence along the east line.
3. Outbuildings: In 1958, E. R. Martin observed a two-story stucco and brick tenement building on the rear of the lot, containing six or eight family units, apparently built at a much later date than the main building. The building is no longer standing, but a large heap of brick rubble indicates that its destruction may have been recent.

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